Bhagawan Mahavira

LIFE, TIMES & TEACHINGS

by

Itihasa-Manishi, Vidyavaridhi

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

1 The Govt of Uttar Pradesh had set up Sri Mahabir Nirvan Samiti, U P., under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister, U P, in 1974, to celebrate the 2500th Nirvan Anniversary of Bhagwan Mahavir Swami, the Great Apostle of Non-violence and the 24th Teerthankar of Jainism. On the expiry of the said committee, it was felt to secure the continuity of the enthusiasm generated by the said committee and the Teerthankar Mahavir Smriti Kendra Samiti, U. P., was constituted in January 1976, as a successor society to Sri Mahabir Nirvan Samiti, U P, under the official patronage of the then Education Secretary to U P Govt This Samiti was set up with the cooperation of all sects of the Jain community with the particular aim of implementing the programmes of Sri Mahabir Nirvan Samiti of a permanent nature and was got registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, in March 1976

The Head Office of the Teerthankar Mahavir Smriti Kendra Samiti, U P, is located in Munne Lal Kagzi Jain Dharmshala, Charbagh, Lucknow, and, its principal activities are as under –

[1] Teerthankar Mahavir Smriti Kendra Shodh Pustakalaya—The aim of this library is to make

available all important published literature on Jainism [pertaining to all sects] together with representative literature of other religions and philosophies for comparative study, at one place, for the benfit of research scholars and other readers The library is steadily growing and a number of research scholars have been utilizing it besides general readers

[2] Teerthankar Mahavir Chhatra Sahayata Kosh—Scholarships and book assistance are provided to needy meritorious students from this Fund

]3] Mahavir Jan Kalyan Nidhi—This Fund has been set up with a view to provide financial assistance to needy persons, deserted women and widows

[4] Publication Scheme–In June 1979, the Samiti published 'Mysteries of Life and Eternal Bliss,' a book written by Acharya Anant Prasad Jain. The present book, 'Bhagawan Mahavira Life, Times & Teachings' written by 'Itihasa manishi' Dr Jyoti Prasad Jain, is the second publication of the Samiti

—Ajit Prasad Jain
Secretary

PREFACE

The mass of ancient and medieaval Jaina literature, canonical, quasi-canonical, exegetical and non-canonical, redacted or written in Prakrit, Sanskrit, Apabhramsha, Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi, contains information about the times, life and teachings of Bhagawan Mahavira [599-527 B C], the last of the twenty-four Tirthankaras In modern times, too, hundreds of new books have been written on Mahavira in the Indian and even in European languages, besides numerous articles Yet the theme is so enchanting and ennobling that it can never be exhausted Every new writer may have something new to say—some hitherto unnoticed fact a fresh interpretation of known facts, a novel approach, or a different emphasis

Mahavira is not a legendary or mythical figure, but is a strictly historical personage who had a tremendous impact not only on the life and thought of His contemporaries, but also on those of the generations that followed During the two thousand and five hundred years since His nirvana in 527 B C., millions of people have received inspiration and benefited from His example and precepts Thousands of selfless saints and crores of lay men and women have transformed their lives, produced a voluminous literature on diverse subjects and in different languages, created numerous beautiful works of art and architecture and established and run countless philanthropic institutions and works of charity Mahavira

Bhagawan Mahavira, the fountain-head of religion, the organiser of the orders, self enlightened, the best among men, the master of the world, the opener of vision, the giver of path, of shelter, of enlightenment and of righteousness, the propounder, the leader and the chariot-driver of Dharma, tho holder of unobstructed best knowledge and faith, free from error, victor, omniscient, enlightened, the teacher of the doctrines, the liberated, the liberator, all knowing, all-seeing, intent on attaining the sphere of the liberated souls, which is eternal, fixed, disease-free, endless, and wherefrom there is no gliding back and forth —*Bhagawati Sutra*, I, 2

Worship Lord Mahavira, the ascetic adorable, who fasted for months and suffered the hardship of nudity, so that ye may be free of the three-fold ignorance of doubt, wrongfulness and negligence, and of the intoxicants that wealth, power and learning are —*Yajurveda*, XIX, 14

Nigganthа-Nataputta [Mahavira] was all-knowing and all-seeing, and endowed with unlimited knowledge and vision, who alone could declare that, whether He was walking or standing,awake or asleep, the unbounded knowledge and intuition were constantly His, continuous and undisturbed —*Majjhima Nikaya*, I

Obeissance to Vardhamana Mahavira, the Jina, who hath conquered fear and all other spiritual aberrations, is devoid of attachment and aversion, is the dispeller of all doubts, and is the establisher of the Dharma-Tirtha for the good of all

Mahavira, the Most Auspicious One !
Mahavira, the Noblest One !!
Mahavira, the Best Refuge !!!



BHAGWAN MAHAVIRA

BHAGAWAN MAHAVIRA
LIFE, TIMES & TEACHINGS

'What is religion, but the adoration of a Perfect One', says an Indian poet-thinker, and 'Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime', avers one from the far West. Both these statements are strikingly true of Lord Mahavira who was one of the greatest teachers of mankind, 'a teacher, indeed, through whom the problem of the perfection of man came to be recognized as the highest problem before progressive humanity' It is common experience that the world, as it is, presents after all a gloomy picture, and in contrast to it the bright prospect of the religious life, as lived and taught by the universally great men like Mahavira the Jina, stands out in bold relief. He upheld that the soul is the highest reality in life and that salvation, emancipation, liberation or nirvana is nothing but the eternal and blissful condition of the soul itself in perfection, which can be realised in this very existence, solely by one's own efforts, provided these are well directed The fruition of religious efforts thus consists in the development and manifestation of supreme personality, the highest example of which is the life of the Master Himself, which is also the best source of inspiration for the earnest aspirants and seekers after Truth

Tirthankara Tradition

Mahavira was the last of the twenty-four Tirthankaras, or expounders of religion, who were born in anci-

ent India, one after the other, at different intervals Rishabha, also known as Adideva or Adinātha (the First Lord), of the hoary antiquity was the first in the series Munisuvrata, the twentieth, was a contemporary of Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*, and Arishtanemi, the twenty-second, was the first cousin of Krishna of the *Bhāgavata-Purana* and *Mahābhārata* fame The next Tirthankara, Pārshva, a Kshatriya prince of Varanasi, lived in 877-777 B C, about two hundred and fifty years before Mahavira who is assigned on good authority to 599-527 B C

Mahavira was thus the last of the greatest representatives and leaders of that ancient current of Indian culture and religious thought which has been known in different times under names such as Ārhat, Vrātya, Śramana, Nirgrantha, Bhavya and Jaina, as distinct from the sister current designated respectively as the Bārhat, Vedic, Brāhmana, Bhāgavata (Śaiva, Vaihnava, etc), Bhakta and Hindu, but, if not more, equally as old, fully developed, well established, and fairly diffused throughout the subcontinent

Names, Aliases and Epithets

Mahavira (lit the Great Hero) has been known by several names, such as Vardhamāna (the Ever Progressive One), Vira (the Brave One), Ativira (the Very Brave One) and Sanmati (the Wise) He was called a 'Jina' because he had conquered the Self, a 'Śramana' because he believed in self-purification through personal effort, as also in the basic equality of all souls and in equanimity as the first condition of spiritual regeneration, and a 'Nirgrantha' be-

cause he had renounced all material possessions and bore no attachment for anything concrete or abstract, material or immaterial He was also designated an 'Arhanta' since he was adorable by all, a 'Kevalin' because he possessed absolute knowledge, and 'Shasta' because he was the best teacher, guide and regulator of religious life People call him Bhagawān (one worthy of devotion), Parameśṭhin (the most chosen spiritual Ideal), Param-Jyotih (the most Enlightened One), Paramātman (the Perfect One, the very God), Sarvajña (the omniscient), Vītarāga (the Pure One, devoid of attachment and aversion), Hitopadeśi (preacher of the good of all), and Tīrthankara (lit. ford-finder), because he expounded and established the path (Tīrtha or ford) to enable suffering humanity cross the ocean that Sansāra, or the world of becoming, the round of births and deaths, is He was a Kāshyapa by *gotra* (male line of descent), a Jñātriputra, being a scion of the Jñātrika clan of the republican Vrātya Kshatriyas of Videha, and has often been described as the Veshālika because he hailed from the capital city of Vaishali which, in fact, was the seat of his maternal grand-father who was the chief of the powerful Lichchhavi clan The Ardhamāgadhi Jaina texts generally allude to him as 'Samane Bhayavam Mahāvīre' (the Shramana Bhagawana Mahavira), and the Pali texts of the Buddhist canon usually call him the Nigantha-nāta-putta The latter also describe him as 'a notable personality', 'a leader of thought,' 'the head of an order', 'the teacher of a school' 'of repute as a sophist', 'one revered by the people', 'a man of experience who has long been a recluse', 'old and well-stricken in years'—the last phrase signifying that

he was a senior contemporary of Gautama the Buddha. These meaningful names, titles and epithets, which Mahavira's contemporaries used for him, or under which he has been since remembered by posterity, give a fairly good glimpse of the grand, adorable and many-sided personality the Great Master possessed

The Age

The sixth century before the birth of Jesus Christ, which saw the rise of Lord Mahavira, was an epoch-making age, which is one of tremendous significance in the history of mankind The atmosphere of almost the entire civilized world was surcharged with an unprecedented intellectual awakening, speculative thinking and emotional fervour A new era was being ushered in, and a new order of things seemed to be taking shape.

In Greece the Ionian philosophers were debating about the primordial constitutive principle of the cosmical universe, and the great Pythogoras gave to the world his 'Doctrine of Harmony' China, in the same age, produced two very great men, Lao-tzu and Confucius (Kung fu-tzu) The former wrote his 'Book of Nature', the greatest classics of Taoism or the Taoist philosophy, and the latter (Confucius) propounded his celebrated Golden Rule In Persia, Zoroaster contributed the doctrine of the conflict between the forces of Light and Darkness, and in Mesopotamia, the prophet Moses was leading his flock back to Jehovah India itself, in that period, saw the rise of, not one or two but dozens of, eminent thinkers, religious reformers, founders of philosophical systems, savants and saintly personages

As a matter of fact, for the Indian society, it was in many ways a period of transition, and the transformations that had begun taking place in the political, economic, social and religious spheres, had a far-reaching impact

The Mahabbharata War and the subsequent imternecine warfare had dealt a shattering blow to the hegemony of the Vedic Kshatriyas, and their place was now being gradually taken by the scions of some of the surviving pre-Aryan regal families The orthodox Vedicists considered them outside the pale and used for them derogatory terms like Kshătra-bandhu and Vrătya-Kshatriya, probably because most of these peoples were followers of the Shramanas The kings of Magadha and the many republican tribes of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar belonged to this stock.

The powerful Vajjian confederacy of republican tribes, with its capital at Vaishali, and the kingdoms of Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa and Avanti were the most important of the 'sixteen premier states' that were in existence in that period. Of these, Magadha, under its ambitious and aggressive monarchs, Bimbisara and Ajatashatru, had already risen to the position of paramountcy, and with its capital at Rajgriha, acted as the matrix and centre of one among the richest religious moments, not of India alone, but perhaps, of the whole world.

In the field of polity, the tribal chieftain of old had now come to be more or less a real king who could

deprive any commoner of his private property The fast emerging institution of nobles and feudal landlords, who acted as intermediaries between the state and the tiller of the soil, contributed to the strengthening of autocratic kingship Certain democratic elements, however, were still in operation even in monarchical states, for example, the people had a voice in choosing the king who had to make certain promises at the time of his accession to the throne, act on the advice of his ministers and on occasions referred to popular assemblies, the Sabha and the Samiti In the tribal republics, like those of the Lichchhavis, Mallas, Videhas and Sakyas, the democratic character of the government was naturally more in evidence Wars between neighbouring s ates were frequent, but the common people seldom suffered, loot, rapine, destruction and devastation do not appear to have been generally indulged in by the warring parties

In the economic sphere, cultivation of land was the predominant occupation, but different handicrafts and cottage industries were also fast developing, and workers in different trades were organising themselves into distinct guilds King Shrenika of Magadha is said to have been a pioneer in the formation and organization of such industrial and commercial guilds (*shrenis* and *nigammas*) Even the Buddha himself had great admiration for the noble character of Mahavira's people, the freedom loving Lichchhavis of Vaishali, and for their excellent democratic institutions and republican system of government The specialisation, growth and spread of industry gave a boost to trade and commerce Big

caravans laden with merchandise, went east and west and across deserts Besides the big metropolises like Vaishali, Rajgriha, Champa, Varanasi, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Ujjain and Mathura, numerous trading centres had sprung up in different parts of the country, each possessing a considerable number of rich merchants, bankers and traders Contacts with a number of foreign countries by land and sea were being established The number of serfs and slaves also increased Trade was free, determined by demand and supply and not hampered by state control Coined money was replacing barter, bills of credit were not unknown, lending money on interest was considered legitimate, and the repayment of debt an honourable obligation There was freedom of initiative and labour was in a large measure mobile In the countryside, life was simple, frugal and hardy, but in the cities, it was one of ease and luxury, pomp and show, with a fairly high standard of living There were many who could afford to indulge in cultural and aesthetic pursuits On the whole, people were generally happy, struggle of life had not yet become so hard, it was a surplus economy

The political and economic inequalities had not, perhaps, yet become so galling as the social inequalities were The influence and hold of the Brahmanas, as religious functionaries, over the bulk of the population, had increased so much that they began to arrogate the designation and status of 'the gods of earth' Their growing exclusiveness led to a division of the entire society into more or less rigid, endogamous and exclusive

caste and subcaste groups, based, not on aptitude, calling or vocation, but on the accident of birth. The aura of superiority and the position of supremacy of the Brahmana were, however, not unquestioned since the Kshatriya was still able to contest them with him at every step, even in the sphere of religion and scholarship And, neither could afford to ignore or despise the Vaish who held the purse-strings and was the mainspring of the entire economy The Shudra, with his numerous, and mostly endogamous, occupational subcaste-groups was the victim of exploitation at the hands of the three priveleged, and the so-called 'twice-born', castes He was generally denied the facilities of decent living and even the benefits of active religion There were also many outside the pale of even this four-fold caste system, such as the Chandalas, Antyajas, untouchables or out-castes, who enjoyed no civic rights and were little better than animals Equally pitiable was the fate of the slaves, of both sexes, who were bought and sold like chattels in open market As soon as one happened to become a slave, he lost his caste and identity, ceased to possess any civil or legal rights, and was the sole property of his master who could do anything to him The institution of slavery was one of the social ills against which Bhagawan Mahavira raised his voice and which he succeeded in eradicating from the society

With the growth of autocratic monarchies, feudalism, trade and industry and, above all, of the rigidity of the caste system, the status, position and lot of the woman, in home and society, deteriorated. Encouragement to polygamous tendency, particularly in the Brahmanical

section, further contributed to her degradation The Vrãtya-Kshatriyas of the republican tribes, however, appear to have been generally monogamous, as were Mahavira's grandfather, father and several other kinsmen and relatives. Man was the head of the family, he had the right to dispose of his property as he liked, and could deprive the daughters and widows of their inheritance A widow had no legal right to her husband's estate except that of mere subsistence. Marriage was widely and acutely diffused, had assumed the form of sacrament, and was generally arranged by the guardians of the parties concerned People prferred to marry in the caste and, if possible, with the daughter of the maternal uncle However, inter-caste unions, or those of choice, were not rare Extra-marital relations were looked down upon, but those who could afford could keep concubines The institution of courtesans was very much in evidence Some of them were very rich and highly accomplished, and commanded the respect of the gentry and the royalty

The Brahmana priest was trying to bind the householder's life in a series of rites, ceremonies and sacraments, which commenced even before the conception of the child and covered his entire life from birth to death, even beyond it No doubt, only a section of the people conformed to these rules and regulations. Popular festivities and very diffused celebrations tended to make life gay Inspite of the Brahmana, society had not yet become static, it was rather in a state of transition, and was still characterised by a healthy catholicity, tolerance,

charity and generosity and loved to honour the good, the wise and the brave.

In fact, in no other age and country do we find diffused among all classes of people as earnest a spirit of enquiry, so impartial and deep a respect for all who came forward as teachers, however contradictory their doctrines might be

The pundits of the orthodox section of the Vedicists were giving final shape to the Vedic texts, the Samhitas, and writing abstruse commentaries on them, which tended to make the sacrificial ritual very elaborate, complicated and rigid The simple chanters of sacred hymns of early Vedic times had now formed themselves into an organised and powerful class of religious functionaries who succeeded in creating in the popular mind the impression that a suitable combination of rites, priests and objects of sacrifice had the magical power of producing the desired effect The fruit usually sought after was no spiritual benefit or moral edification, but some worldly gain, such as the increase in fame, power or pelf of the sacrificer, the birth of a son to him, or the destruction of his enemies Thanks to the efforts of Tirthankaras Arishtanemi and Parshva, who pioneered the movement for the revival of Shramana dharma in the later Vedic age, sacrifices had gradually become much less frequent as well as much less bloody. The core of the Smritis (law-books) was being framed and a strict adherence to the four-caste system and the four-stages of a man's life was being emphasised

There was, however, a strong section led mainly by the Kshatriyas who vehemently opposed Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifices on the basis of the Vedic tradition itself in which they began to seek the seeds of spiritualism and evolved the mystic philosophy of the Upanishads The so-called six schools of Brahmanical philosophy, as also the atheistic materialism of the Chārvāka, saw their rise about this time. Then, there were large sections of backward and ignorant people who indulged in the propitiation or worship of local deities, ghosts, spirits and demons and in diverse superstitions.

The other important current of Indian thought and culture, the Shramana, did not recognise the authority of the Vedas, the superior status of the Brahmana and the Varnāśrama (caste-stage) system With non-violence and renunciation as its keynotes, it laid emphasis on personal moral uplift, ethical conduct and spiritual behaviour In the Shramana fold, people were eagerly expecting the appearance of the last Tirthankara, on the basis of a traditional belief The result was that dozens of religious preachers roamed about the land, each enlisting followers and claiming for himself that honour. As many as 63 or 363 different shades of philosophy are said to have been prevailing at that time, which may be grouped into several broad heads, viz., materialism, scepticism, formalism, fatalism, eternalism, the doctrine of action and the doctrine of non-action. The more important of the Shramana teachers of that age were Purana Kassapa, Ajita Kesakambli, Pakudha (Kakudha) Kātyāyana, Sanjaya Velathiputta, Makkhali Gosāla (the founder of the Ājivika sect), Gautama the Buddha who

founded Buddhism, and Bhagawan Mahavira who revived and reformed the creed of the ancient Jinas or Shramana Tirthankaras and reorganised the four-fold order of monks, nuns, laymen and lay-women He sought to remove the prevailing inequalities and disparities, philosophical, social and economic, by advocating his rational philosophy of Anekantic Syadvada and his doctrines of Ahimsa, renunciation, equality of all souls and pragmatic optimism The religious movement of the sixth century B C met the challenges of the age squarely and appears to have been a profound one

Life of the Master

It was in such an age and amidst such a kaleidoscope of human wisdom that Mahavira made his appearance, and was among the foremost of those who contributed towards the success of the aforesaid religious and cultural movement The moment he stepped on the stage he was unequivocally acclaimed as the ardently awaited Tirthankara

Birth—He was born in B C 599, on the 13th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra, 178 years after the nirvana of the penultimate Tirthankara, Parshva, and belonged to the martial race of the Kshatriyas His father Siddhartha, son of Sarvartha, was the head of the Jñatrika clan, an important confederate of the powerful Vajjian confederacy of republican states The great city of Vaishali (modern Basarh in the Muzaffarpur district of Bihar) was the headquarters of the confederacy all the heads or elders of which were given the title 'raja'. Chetaka, the leader of the Lichchhavi clan, was the

supreme head of the confederacy and his son, Simhabhadra, was the commander-in-chief of its armed forces, Chetaka's daughter, Trishala, also called Priyakārini, Vishala and Videhadattā, was married to Siddhārtha, the Jñātrika raja of Kundagrāma (Kollaga, Vasukunda or Kshatriya-Kunda, near Basarh) where she gave birth to Mahavira Through her, he was related to emperors Bimbisara-Shrenika and Ajatashatru-Kunika of Magadha and kings Dadhivahana, Shatanika, Prodyota, Dasharatha and Udayana, respectively of Anga, Vatsa, Avanti, Dasharna and Sindhu-Sauvira, who were married to her several sisters King Jitashatru of Kalinga was related to Mahavira through his father Thus he was well-connected and, although the son of a petty republican chief, belonged, according to the standards of even that age, to a highly respected family He had all the worldly goods at his disposal and suffered from no want or disability He was born in a free and freedom-loving environment, and his parents were well-educated, cultured, brave, gentle and pious They followed the creed of the preceding Tirthankara, Parshva, and worshipped in shrines dedicated to the holy Arhatas

Even before Mahavira's birth, certain auspicious dreams seen by the mother and other signs had signified that a great immortal was going to be born No wonder, when the moment arrived, it was celebrated with eclat and universal rejoicing The needy were liberally provided and prisoners granted general amnesty The fortunes of the family and the prosperity of the land and the people were on the increase in an unprecedented

manner, hence the child was given the name Vardhamāna He was extremely good-looking, perfectly healthy, and the beloved of all He possessed the one thousand and eight marks and signs of a truly great personage Everybody was happy. Indeed, it was a great birth that takes place once in a while, also because greater still was the life that the child was to lead in future, and the greatest the truth that He was to reveal for the good of the entire humanity.

Childhood and Youth—From His early childhood Mahavira evinced signs of profound intelligence, wonderful mental and physical power, undaunted bravery and fearlessness, superb strength of character, a highly contemplative and religious bent of mind and extremely gentle and compassionate nature He had inherited from His parents all that was good and praiseworthy in them, in addition to the spiritual heritage He had acquired as a result of self-discipline and piety practised by His self in a number of previous births He was thus endowed with a soul well advanced on the path of spiritual evolution. He was no ordinary child, the sapling destined to bloom into a big and beautiful tree has smooth leaves The worthy parents, no less solicitous than loving, brought up this apple of their eye with the utmost care

The boy Mahavira took active part in games and sports and was the acknowledged leader of all the young boys of the neighbourhood On several occasions His physical strength, daring, fearlessness and presence of mind were put to severe tests, and every time he came out with flying colours Whether it was a wild elephant

run amok, a terrible serpent in the garden, some celestials in disguise, or any other ordeal, it had little effect on the Great Hero

In matters of education, too, there was nothing which He did not already know No teacher, however learned, could teach Him anything new Yet, the formalities of educating Him were undergone The process had started while He was yet in the womb of the mother, by placing her under the care of the best attendants and companions available, who provided her healthy amusements, aesthetic pleasures, invigorating recreations, and intellectual exercises meant to widen her knowledge and sharpen her intellect These attentions paid to the mother had naturally their desired effect on the child she was carrying And, after birth, when He attained school-going age, He was sent to the best teachers that could be found in the land

The blessed child thus gradually grew up into a very fine, handsome and cultured youngman who commanded the love and esteem of everybody He came in contact with Offers of marriage also began to pour in He, however, politely but firmly declined to enter into matrimony because it did not fit in with the life He had chosen for Himself He was destined for much higher things, and could not afford to indulge in the pleasures of the flesh, in worldly comforts, ease and luxury, nor to confine His interests within the narrow limits of the home and the family.

In fact, Mahavira was very much alive to the patent misery, pain and suffering noticed whitherever He cared

to look The bloody sacrifices and the cruel and reckless slaughter of animals, not only for food and pleasure but also in the holy name of religion and for the purpose of propitiating diverse gods and goddesses, the pretensions, caste exclusiveness and arrogant high-handedness of the Brahmanas, the bad plight and exclusion from the benefits of active religion of the bulk of the masses comprising the so-called lower castes and outcastes, the inferior status and disabilities imposed on women, the institution of slavery, the feudal system, economic disparities and exploitation of the weak by the strong, inequity and injustice prevailing all round, various other social, economic and political ills, superstitions, scepticism and a general degeneration of moral values were very much in evidence The numerous religious teachers and sectarians, who often preached conflicting tenets, made confusion worse confounded The conditions were sorely in need of a true saviour

Renunciation and Penance—Mahavira, therefore, when not even of thirty years in age, renounced the world in B C 570 He liberally distributed all he possessed among the needy, nobody went dissatisfied from his doors Then he repaired to the nearby Jnatra-khand forest, took off all the clothes and ornaments from his body, becoming perfectly nude, plucked the hair of the head with own hands and took the vow of asceticism This Great Renunciation marked the beginning of a career of penance and severe austerities, self-discipline and self-purification He kept long fasts lasting for days, weeks and sometimes months together, spoke little and roamed about from

place to place, staying to rest for a while in some deserted place With superb fortitude and equanimity, without ill-will towards anybody, he bore the inclemency of the weather, the onslaught of insects and beasts, and insults, slights, tortures and diverse afflictions at the hands of perverse men and even gods and demons Most of the time of this great Yogin was spent in self-introspection, deep contemplation and concentrated spiritual meditation At last, through this twelve-year long spiritual discipline of the highest order, the Great Hero succeeded in His quest for the Truth, attained Kaivalya, and became the greatest spiritual Victor, the Jina, and the all knowing, all-seeing Arhata.

Enlightenment and Promulgation of Wheel of Law—Thus, in B. C 557, Mahavira obtained Enlightenment while one afternoon he was sitting under a sal tree in a park on the bank of the river Rijukula, outside the village of Jrambhika (in eastern Bihar) From there he went to Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha, enlisted as his principal disciples (Ganadharas) a team of highly learned eleven pundits, headed by Indrabhuti Gautama, delivered his first sermon from the top of Mount Vipula outside Rajagriha, on the first of the month of Shravana (August 1, B C 557), and thus promulgated his Dharma-Chakra (the Wheel of Law) for the benefit of all the living beings. For the next thirty years, the Tirthankara went from place to place, giving his message of peace and goodwill in the language of the masses, the Ardha-Magadhi His audience was called Samavasarana, because it was open to all without distinction of race,

colour, caste, class, sex or age, and everyone of them had equal opportunity of listening to and being benefited by the teachings of the Master who, indeed, was one of the most powerful speakers that ever stood before an audience He spoke with all the forcefulness of truth which carried ready conviction to the hearts of his hearers. It is said that He spoke the language everybody could understand No wonder, because it was the language of love—love for all

Nirvana—At last, this all-time great and noble career came to an end with the passing of the Lord into Nirvana, in the last watch of the night of the 14th day of dark half of Kartika (Tuesday, 15th October, B C 527), on the bank of the Lotus-pond, outside the city of Pawa (near Patna in Bihar) The celebration was attended by profuse illumination and marked the commencement of the very popular Indian festival of Deepawali (the Feast of the Lamps) Light is the symbol of knowledge, and signifies that although the corporeal body of the Master was no more, 'the light of knowledge' he disseminated still continues to enlighten mankind.

Mahavira was undoubtedly one of the greatest of the great men of earth, described by Beecher as the 'shadow men', who, having lived and died, now live again and forever through their undying thoughts Thus living, though their footfalls are heard no more, their voices are louder than thunder and unceasing as the flow of tides and air It is not so easy to come to true greatness, one has to feel genuinely that his life belongs to his race and that whatever capacity to do

good he possesses is to be dedicated to the service of mankind. Thus even a person who renders some sort of material assistance to his fellow beings is considered great, but greater are the intellectual benefactors who help us to increase our fund of knowledge, broaden our vision, enlarge our understanding and enable us to know right from wrong. The greatest of all are, however, the great saviours who, by their example and precepts, have brought mental solace and spiritual peace to millions, not only in their own times, but in all times to come Mahavira was in every sense such a great saviour, a truly selfless and completely dedicated benefactor of mankind, nay, of all living beings down to the lowliest of the lowly creatures 'The nobler a soul is, the more objects of compassion it hath', says Bacon, and who would doubt the fact that Mahavira's compassion knew no bounds In fact, it was this boundless compassion for all and sundry, that had been overflowing His entire being, not only since early childhood in this last birth as Vardhamana Mahavira, but in a number of previous births, which qualified him for becoming a Tirthankara

'The first great gift one can bestow on others is a good example', says Morell, and Mahavira by His own superb example remarkably demonstrated that 'all that is most valuable in a man, he must work out and conquer for himself' (Richter), and 'that life in tune with Infinity is the only highway to self-realization, perfection and emancipation'. In fact, as Sir J Stephens has it, "Every man has in himself a continent of character. Happy is he who acts the Columbus to his own soul."

Moreover, Great Minds like Mahavira 'seek to labour for eternity. All other men are captivated by immediate advantages, great minds are excited by the prospect of distant good' (Sciller). A good life is the only Religion !

Teachings

Mahavira's teachings represent a very comprehensive system of religious thought and practice. Ontologically speaking, it does not accept the theory of creation by, or emanation, whether actual or apparent, from a supposed Supreme Being With it the universe is existential and, therefore, real, the cosmic constituents being themselves capable of explaining the diverse phenomena by their action and interaction.

The essence of a thing that has a real, concrete existence is substance, hence everything that exists is a substance of some kind or the other. This substance is the basis of Mahavira's religion and philosophy, for the simple reason that a thing which is not a substance has no real existence at all, or exists only in the mind as an idea A substance cannot suddenly or gradually appear from non-existence.

The world of existence is constituted mainly of two categories of substances, life and non-life (Jiva and Ajiva) and the two together make up the entire universe They are not mere philosophical postulates, but are reals as spirit and matter, each being pluralistic, constitutionally eternal, and not liable to lose or interchange its nature.

The Jiva or Atman (spirit or soul) is essentially constituted of sentiency and its differentia is the mani-

festation of consciousness There are an infinite number of souls in the universe, but each is one complete whole in itself, is eternal, and retains its individuality even in liberation In its pure condition, a soul is without sense qualities, is all the quality of sentiency, is beyond inferential mark and has no definable shape

Thus all souls are alike in their nature, essential qualities and intrinsic characteristics, and are all alike capable of attaining liberation, or the state of godhood

The Ajiva or non-life class consists of five categories : the matter, the neutral and conditional cause of motion, and that of rest, the space and the time That part of space which accommodates all the other substances is relative and is called the Loka or universe Matter (*pudgala*) is concrete, gross, commonplace, perceptible, inanimate, devoid of sentiency, and is the very antithesis of the soul which cannot be perceived by the senses

The substance exhibits as its characteristic feature the trio of origination, destruction and permanence, which is an every day common phenomenon and may be illustrated by a ring of gold coming into existence after a bangle is melted and reshaped—the bangle disappears giving place to the ring which originates while the gold continues to remain as before

Thus the cosmos or universe with all its basic and irreducible constituents, the six categories of substances mentioned above, is a veritable reality by virtue of its very existence It is uncreated, beginningless, endless and eternal as well as self-existent, self-subsisting and

self operating by the natural forces which are eternally inherent in its constituents the substances This realistic start gives Jaina philosophy the character of a dualistic, or even pluralistic, realism.

Again, with the plain dogma that the soul has been associated with matter since time immemorial, Mahavira explained the Samsara, the world of being and becoming, which is full of pain and misery It is as a remedy against such existence, that is, as a means to obtain liberation from the Samsara that Religion is needed. The Samsara (round of rebirths) is a fact and implies transmigration. The ball of rebirths is already set in motion and stops only when the soul attains Moksha or liberation The cause of this Samsara, in relation to a particular soul, is its Karma.

The doctrine of Karma is a peculiarity of Mahavira's system and is based on the simple law of cause and effect. One cannot escape the consequences, good or bad, of his actions, he has to reap what he has sown And, since the consequences of all the acts done cannot be worked out in one and the same lifetime, there must necessarily follow a future birth to enable their fruition The obvious disparity and diversity between one person and another, which cannot be ascribed to one's own efforts, heredity or chance, substantiate the theory With its help transmigration becomes a proven fact, and through it the continuity and immortality of the soul is established beyond doubt

It also provides a scientific and rational explanation for the diverse phenomena and experiences of life, and at

the same time does away with the necessity of any outside agency for punishing or rewarding living beings They and they alone are responsible for their own actions, and themselves benefit by or suffer from the consequences. Man is the master of his destiny which he can make or mar accordingly as he wills It is certainly within his power to fight, extricate himself from, and annihilate the bondage of Karma and become a pure liberated soul, the very God This doctrine steers clear through determinism or fatalism on the one hand and sheer chance or force of circumstances on the other The entire emphasis is on the development of strong will power and conscious personal effort to fight the forces of Karma and achieve the desired goal

One has always to keep in mind the fact of existence without losing sight of the goal It is why the soul, the matter, the influx of Karmic matter into the soul, the Karmic bondage, the stoppage of the influx, partial dissociation of Karmic matter from the soul, and the complete liberation of the soul from Karmic bondage have been described as the seven essentials (*Tattvas*) The influx and consequent bondage may be auspicious or inauspicious, taking the form of merit or demerit, but for purposes of liberation both of them have to be dispensed with because both keep the soul in bondage Shackles are shackles, whether they be of gold or of iron An intelligent understanding and profound conviction of the nature of these 'essentials' is a prerequisite condition for launching upon the path of liberation

Liberation, emancipation, nirvana or Moksha consists in the complete freedom from Karma, when the inherent powers of the spirit are fully blossomed It is the end of the world process for the soul which has attained this state. Now on, the liberated soul lives in pure, perfect, absolute and eternal godhood It is at its best, and is all knowledge, all-vision, all-bliss and all-power By no means does the nirvana in Jainism mean an extinction or obliteration of the individual, or even of the inherent individual traits, nor does it imply submergence of the individuality into some universality And, there is no come back from this state It is the ultimate goal of religion

Every soul thus liberated from the bondage of Karma becomes 'itself' (Swayambhu), and it is the divinity Mahavira's conception of divinity, too, is a realistic pluralism as such divinities are innumerable, and they go on multiplying As a type, a level of spiritual evolution and the culmination of spiritual attainments, divinity or godhood may be said to be one, but since every soul even after attaining divinity continues to retain its individuality, it is manifold The aim of religion is the realisation of the potentially divine in man, which, according to Mahavira, is an attainable ideal for the aspirants pursuing the path of religion, and opens to them a vast vista of optimistic vision

The obstacles in the path of the spiritual evolution of a soul are five delusion, lack of self-control, negligence or inattentiveness, passions and the activities of thought, word and body

The path to salvation consists in the acquisition and perfect blending of the trio of spiritual jewels, viz , Right Belief, Right Knowledge and Right Conduct. For a mystically minded yogin, who looks at things from the pure point of view, it means the realisation and comprehension of and the abiding concentration in the Self, viewed and meditated upon in its pure and perfect state. His whole emphasis is on the transcendental experience of the self by the self, through concentrated spiritual meditation And this is what may be described as the mystical idealism of the Jaina yogins

From the practical point of view, however, it is enough to have a right conviction, belief or faith in the seven Essentials (Jiva, Ajiva, influx, bondage, etc), stated before, and a true comprehension of the nature of things substantially essential in connection with the path to liberation, together with the appropriate conduct necessary for pursuing the path

The aspirants are divided into two classes, the ascetics and the laity, each of which may comprise both the sexes Hence the four-fold order, made up of monks, nuns, laymen and lay-women, is said to constitute the following of Mahavira, the Jina Elaborate rules of conduct have been prescribed for each of the two classes Ahimsa is the keynote of the entire ethical system of Mahavira Non-injury of all living beings, truthfulness, non-stealing or non-misappropriation of others' belongings, limited possessions and celebacy are the five primary vows A lay man or woman observes them only partially, whereas the ascetic observes them absolutely.

Forgiveness, humility, integrity, truthfulness, greedlessness, self-control, penance, renunciation, possessionlessness and continence constitute the ten-fold dharma which an aspirant is expected to cultivate. Friendship towards all, joy in the meritorious, compassion and sympathy for those in distress, and indifference towards the perverted, is the general attitude advocated Absence of attachment and aversion with respect to all the animate and inanimate objects is the avowed aim of this ethical process To become a true follower of Mahavira one has to imbibe the spirit of 'live and let live', and 'do unto others as one would them to do unto him' The ethical code is regulated according to the varying degrees of spiritual development of the aspirant, and envisages both his internal as well as external progress on the path of salvation.

Syadvada is one aspect of Mahavira's philosophy which has been much misunderstood, and often misconstrued, by many a non-Jaina philosopher who looked upon this approach to reality as indicative of uncertainty and indefiniteness of knowledge This is, however, far from the truth The theory, based as it is on Anekantavada and the related Nayavada, manifests the realistic, rational and highly tolerant spirit of Jainism Instead of creating doubt or uncertainty, Syadvada helps a comprehensive comprehension of the reality.

A synthesis of the different view-points is a practical necessity, and it must be accomplished in such a way that every single view-point retains its relative importance without losing sight of other relevant view-points.

In fact, Syadvada and Nayavada have often been described as the two wings of Anekanta, and are thoroughly consistent with Jaina ontology and the Jaina theory of knowledge Moreover, it is through this Anekantic logic that Mahavira may be said to have attempted a rapprochement between the seemingly conflicting systems of religion and philosophy, and even in other spheres of life, by infusing a breadth of vision, sympathetic understanding, tolerance and a spirit of reconciliation With the help of this philosophy one comes to realise that truth is nobody's monopoly, and a religious aspirant comes to develop an intellectual toleration which is quite in keeping with the doctrine of Ahimsa for which Mahavira's system has all along so eminently stood

Ahimsa is another feature of Mahavira's teachings which is often misunderstood, or not fully understood and duly appreciated This principle of Ahimsa, non-violence or non-injury to life, is nevertheless one of extreme importance and universal application

Mahavira defined 'dharma' as the nature of substance, hence as the nature of the soul, and is equated with Ahimsa The state of perfect equilibrium, unruffled peace and beatitude, which is devoid of ignorance, delusion and all sense of attachment and aversion, is the essential, intrinsic nature of the pure soul It is its 'dharma', that is, Ahimsa. It is why Ahimsa has been described as Param-Brahma (the very God).

As soon as the individual soul (a person) deviates or departs from this nature or 'dharma' of its own, it

becomes a '*himsaka*' and commits '*himsa*' In other words, so long as the soul remains '*vītarāga*' (devoid of attachment and aversion) and concentrated in self-realisation, it is Ahimsaka or Ahimsite, but no sooner does it get corrupted, develop passional states like anger, conceit, deceit, greed, sensual or sexual desires, feelings of envy, jealousy, hatred, etc , it becomes '*himsaka*', causing injury, in the first instance, to its own self, to its own spiritual nature This is subjective '*himsa*' and it often manifests itself in the person's gestures, facial expressions, violent tone, voice and bodily movements, causing physical injury to himself He does not stop there, under the influence of that subjective '*himsa*', he, more often than not, causes injury, mental, physical or both, to other living beings This is the apparent, objective '*himsa*'

For practical conduct and behaviour and living a religious life, numerous rules, a systematic ethical code, both for the laity and the ascetics, have been prescribed, and their keynote is Ahimsa All of them revolve around this central doctrine Various aspects of Himsa and Ahimsa have been discussed at length The ascetic observes complete Ahimsa, but a layman or a laywoman is granted many exemptions, and is expected to observe the vow only partially His is the Ahimsa-anuvrata, whereas that of the ascetic is the Ahimsa-mahavrata. A person, living a mundane worldly existence, as we all are, abstains only from causing intentional, rash, negligent or selfishness-motivated mental or physical injury to other living beings, by his thought, word or deed, himself,

through the agency of others, or even by approving of such an act done by somebody else He can and does, however, take recourse to necessary or unavoidable '*himsa*' in the defence of his person, family, property, religion, society and country, in his day-to-day living activities and in his economic pursuits But, even in these he has to be careful and try to avoid more than the minimum possible injury to life, required for the purpose As a matter of fact, shirking these three types of '*himsa*'—the incidental or accidental, occupational or vocational, and the protective or defensive—would be considered a dereliction of duty on the part of a lay householder It is only the 'himsa' for 'himsa's sake, for mere pleasure or the fun of it, without any thought or without any higher end in view, that the lay aspirants are asked to guard themselves against No doubt, one has to ask himself at every step whether the injury involved is necessary, and if so, what is the minimum needed in a particular case The rule of minimum injury should ever be one's guiding motto

In almost every civilised religion sanctity of human life has been recognized, but few go beyond it Mahavira's creed, on the other hand, recognizes the sanctity of all life, including beasts, birds, fish, fowl, and the smaller creatures down to the lowliest of the lowly With it, life is sacred in whatever form it is found to exist. Non-injury to life is, therefore, the highest ethical principle, and a true gentleman is one who has no tendency to do violence to anybody, nay, to any living being.

Some say, 'war is necessary to end war,' or 'Himsa is necessary to establish Ahimsa,' but if the aim of religion is to bring peace on earth and goodwill amongst mankind, it must always emphasise the ultimate good and declare evil as evil even if it may appear to be unavoidable at a particular time or in a particular set of circumstances. Good cannot come out of evil The Ahimsite way of life is the surest path to human happiness.

Ahimsa is the highest religion, and where there is Ahimsa, there is Victory This, in brief, is the gist of the teaching of Bhagawan Mahavira, the Apostle of Ahimsa, the greatest Benefactor of Mankind and the last Tirthankara of the Jaina tradition of India.

The Ahimsite way of life is the sure panacea for all moral, social, economic and political ills of human civilization. 'Thou shalt not kill or hurt any living being in thought, word or deed', is the motto Ahimsa is the highest religion, and where there is Ahimsa, there is Victory !

Mahavira's system of life and thought thus incorporates the best elements of a dynamic realism and a relative pluralism, yogic mysticism and transcendental spiritualism, superb idealism and most hopeful optimism, perfect egalitarianism and noblest humanitarianism, a scientific rationalism and wholesome pragmatism Above all, it is an ethical system par excellence, that helps the building of character, so aptly defined by Macduff, 'as the product of daily, hourly actions and words and

thoughts, daily forgiveness, unselfishness, kindnesses, sympathies, charities, sacrifices for the good of others, struggles against temptation, submissiveness under trial. Oh ! it is these, like the blending colours in a picture or the blending notes of music, which constitute the man' The purpose of religion is harmony, which Mahavira sought to emphasise at every step To be at peace with the world, He said, you must understand people around you, and to do that you must first understand your own self. This is the key to happiness

And, this is the ethos of the teaching and summum bonum of the heritage of Bhagawan Mahavira, the Apostle of Ahimsa, the great Benefactor of mankind, and the twenty-fourth Tirthankara of the Jaina tradition of India

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Selected Sayings of Bhagawan Mahavira

1 Dharma is the essence of existence, and it is two-fold-comprehension of reality, and the application of that knowledge in life

2. Mere reading holy books is of no avail unless knowledge derived from them is translated into practice and used in shaping one's conduct in life

3 Right conduct consists in one's abstaining from hurting others, from speaking untruth, from misappropriating others' property, from wanton indulgence in sex,and from unduly holding to possessions —this, in short, is the five-fold 'good conduct'

4. The ten-fold Dharma (piety) is made up of forgiveness, humility, honesty, greedlessness, truthfulness, self-control, curb on one's desires, renunciation, detachment and possessionlessness.

5 The differentia of Dharma is Ahimsa, and compassion ennobles it.

6 Respect for others—absence of pride, vanity and ego—is the root of Dharma

7 O' Man ! if thou fearest old age and death, quaff the nectar that is Dharma so that thou may become ageless and deathless

8 For living beings flowing helplessly in the rapid current of birth, decay and death, Dharma is the only island, the support, the destination and the safest haven

9 O' Gautama ! human life is as ephemeral as a dew drop on the end of a blade of grass Therefore, do not idle away even for a moment

10 Dharma alone is auspicious and pure, and it alone is the bestower of all bliss and happiness, hence waste not a moment in starting to adopt, follow and practise Dharma

11 If pain is distasteful to you, know well that it is similarly distasteful to other living beings

12. Treat all living beings as your own self

13 The being that you want to kill is a living being like your own self, the one whom you wish to hurt or cause pain, is a living being like your own self;

the one you want to rule over, make submissive or obedient to you, is a living being like your own self The wise who realising this truth, live their life, neither kill nor instigate others to kill. He who commits violence has to bear its consequences Hence never think of hurting or causing injury to others

14. What is Dharma but to be actively compassionate towards living beings

15. There is no Dharma like kindness, no charity better than feeding the hungry, no fame better than to be known truthful, and no ornament better than good character

16 Be ever ready to help those who are helpless, or are in need of help, protection or support

17 One should promptly, willingly and carefully nurse and treat those who are ailing, so that they may be cured and recover health

18. He who tries to make others happy, himself gets happiness

19 It is the selfless service of others that enables the soul to attain perfection and become a Tirthankara.

20 Be friendly to all living beings

21 Do not insult, rebuke or abuse anybody.

22 Anger kills love, conceit destroys respectfulness, deceit is the enemy of friendship, and greed brings about the ruin of every other virtue.

23. Just as there is nothing smaller than an atom and bigger than the space, no vow is greater than the vow to practice Ahimsa

24. One should always speak truthful words which do good to others

25. Do not speak more than is necessary

26. Lies are the doors for sin to enter

27 He who does not buy a thing for less than its value, does not misappropriate other's property, is satisfied with lawful moderate profit, and does not rob other's property by deceit, greed, anger or vanity, is the strong-willed honest observer of the layman's partial vow of non-stealing.

28 One who abandons himself in the clutches of the demon of lust, becomes incapable of distinguishing good from bad, he remains ignorant of the nature of his own soul

29 A man's desires are as unlimited as the space, they are insurmountable.

30 Money is the root of evil For money man does many bad things which he would not otherwise do

31 Misery ends for him who is free from delusion, if there are no desires, there is no delusion, desire evaporates in the absence of avarice, and greediness disappears in a person who has renounced all possessions.

32 The soul itself is the cause and the enjoyer of its pain and pleasure; it is its own friend which leads it

up the path of virtue, and its own enemy which hurtles it down the path of evil

33. If a brave hero, instead of conquering lakhs of invincible warriors in a terrible war, were to conquer his own Self alone, this victory of his would be deemed the noblest

34 Fight with thy own self, why to fight with foes external ? He who conquers the self by the self is the truly happy person.

35 The enemy who cuts your throat does not do you so much harm as your own soul when steeped in sin. The essential thing is right knowledge and proper understanding, but even more essential is faith in oneself

36 Know thyself Realise thyself !

37 He who does not realise the Self, may indulge in all sorts of religious practices, he cannot attain fulfilment, and remains a world-engrossed mundane being

38 He who, living in the midst of world-engrossed persons, treats all living beings as his own self, realises the ephemeral character of life, and with a wakefulness applies himself to the practice of self-control and self-discipline, is the justly deserving candidate for attaining liberation

39. One should always be equanimous between gain and loss, happiness and pain, life and death, praise and censure, respect and insult.

40. Indulgence in meat eating, drinking liquors, gambling, prostitution, hunting, thieving and adultery is the cause of misfortune Hence a lay aspirant must abstain from these seven vices

41 It is the practice of piety, and no external mark or accident of birth, which is the *sine qua non* of a lay aspirant, man or woman

42. It is not the body that commands adoration, nor do one's parentage, caste or class make him venerable. Who would bow before one that lacks virtue, be the latter an ascetic or a lay devotee ?

43 It is a person's own deeds and conduct that make him a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, a Vaish, or a Shudra—not the mere accident of birth.

44 Nothing in this world can do good or evil to a person but his own unnatural feelings, emotions and passions, they are the cause of his Karmic bondage, and not anything else

45 One reaps what he sows, one has to bear the fruits of his own actions

46. In a pure heart the lamp of enlightenment continues ever to burn and emit light

47 Enmity can never end enmity, love and friendliness alone can put an end to hostility—this is the eternal law

48 Let us not think evil of anybody.

49 None should ever desire the ill of others.

50 May all the living beings in the universe be happy, and remain ever happy!

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Salient Facts about Mahavira's Life

Names and aliases	—Vardhamāna, Mahāvīra, Sanmati, Vīra, Ativīra, Veshālika, Nirgrantha-Jñātriputra
Date of birth	—Chaitra Shukla 13, in the year 178 of Tirthankara Parshva's Nirvana (corresponding March, 599 B C)
Place of birth	—Kundagrama, near Vaishali, in the country of Videha (modern northern Bihar)
Lineage	—Ikshvāku
Gotra	—Kāshyapa
Clan	—Jñātrika, of the Vrātya Kshatriyas
Paternal Grand-parents	—King Sarvārtha and queen Shrīmatī.
Father	—King Siddhārtha of Kundagrāma
Mother	—Trishalā Priyakārini alias Vishālā and Videhadattā
Maternal Grand-parents	—Chetaka, the Licchavi king of Vaishali and head of the Vajjian confederacy of 18 republican clans, and his queen Subhadrā.
Maternal uncles	—Singhabhadra, the commander-in-chief of the Vajjian confederacy, and his nine brothers.

Mother's sisters	—Shivadevi, queen of Chanda Pradyota, the king of Avanti, Mrigavati, queen of Shatanika, the king of Vatsa, Prabhavati, queen of Udāyana, the king of Sindhu-Sauvira, Padmavati, queen of Dadhivāhana, the king of Anga, Chellanā, queen of Shrenika Bimbisara the king of Magadha and mother of his successor Ajatashatru Kunika, Jyeshthā and Chandanā—both virgin nuns
Father's brother	—Supārshva, the general of the Jñatrikas
Father's sister	—Yashodayā, queen of Jitashatru, the king of Kalinga—their daughter, princess Yashoda was betrothed to Mahavira. Since marriage did not take place, the virgin princess (Kumari) became a nun and practised austerities on a hill (near Bhuvaneshvar, Orrissa) hence called the Kumari Parvat (the Virgin's Hill)
Brother	—Nandivardhana
Renunciation	—Margashirsha Krishna 10 (corresponding November, 570B C.) at the age of about 29 years

Enlightenment	—Vaishakha Shukla 10 (corresponding April, 557 B C.), as a result of more than 12 years' ascetic life full of austerities and penances on the banks of the Rij nkula outside village Irambhika
First Sermon	—On Mt Vipula of Rajagriha, on early morning of Shravana Krishna 1 (corresponding 1st August, 557 B C)
Ganadharas (chief disciples)	—Eleven, headed by Indrabhūti Gautama
Male ascetics initiated into the reorganised Order	—14,000, headed by Gautama
Female ascetics (nuns) initiated	—36,000, headed by Chandanā
Laymen (Shravakas) initiated	—1,59,000, headed by Shankha-shataka
Lay-women (Shravikās) initiated	—3,18,000, headed by Sulasa and Revati
Chief listener (*shrotā*)	—King Shrenika Bimbisara of Magadha, who is said to have asked 60,000 questions, which were answered by the Ganadhara

Principal devotees —Queens Chellana, Shivadevi, Mrigavati, Prabhavati, Padmavati, Yashodaya, princesses Yashoda and Jayanti, ladies like Sulasa and Revati; kings like Bimbisara, Ajatashatru, Shatanika, Udāyana, Pradyota, Jitashatru, Dadhivahana, Prasenjit, Shivaraja, Jivandhara, Karakandu, Prasannachandra, princes like Singhabhadra and his brothers, Abhayakumara, Meghakumara Gajakumara, Nandisena, Varishena (sons of Shrenika), Ardraka Kumar (an Iranian prince), merchants like Sudarshana, Ananda, Dhanna, Shalibhadra, Jambukumara and nine others, chāndalas like Metarya and Harikeshabala, converted brigands like Rohineya, Arjunamālī, Anjana, Vidyutchara, Rupakhura, Suvarnakhura Many other names are preserved in the traditions

Field of missionary activity —almost the whole of India

Duration of propagation of the faith by him—a little over 30 years

Nirvana	—Before dawn on Kartika Krishna 15 (corresponding Tuesday, 15th of October 527 B C), 250 years after Parshva's Nirvana (in 777 B C), 470 years before the beginning of the Vikrama era and 605 years and 5 months before that of the Saka era (of 78 A D), the day since celebrated as the Deepavali (Feast of Lamps)
Place of Nirvana	—on the bank of the Lotus Pond at Pava (near Patna in Bihar)
Total period of life	—71 years, 6 months and 17 days

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Thinkers' Tribute

1 Mahavira proclaimed in India, the message of salvation that religion is reality and not a mere con vention, that salvation comes from taking refuge in the true religion and not from observing the external ceremonies of the community, that religion cannot regard any barriers between man and man as an eternal verity Wondrous to say, this teaching rapidly overtopped the barriers of the race's abiding instinct and conquered the whole country

— Ravindranath Tagore

2 Lord Mahavira again brought into prominence the doctrine of Jainism Jain religion was prevalent in India before Buddhism In ancient times innu-

merable animals were butchered in sacrifice The credit of the disappearance of the massacre from the Brahmanical religion goes to the share of Jainism

—Bal Gangadhar Tilak

3. No religion of the world has explained the principle of Ahimsa so deeply and systematically as discussed, with its applicability in life, in Jainism As and when this benevolent principle of Ahimsa will be sought for practice by the people of the world to achieve their ends of life in this world and beyond, Jainism is sure to have the uppermost status and Bhagwan Mahavira is sure to be respected as the greatest authority on Ahimsa. If anybody had developed the doctrine of non-violence, it was Lord Mahavira I request you to understand the teachings of Mahavira, think over it and translate it into action

—Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

4 Mahavira is not the founder of Jainism He revived the Jaina doctrines. He was more a reformer than the founder of the faith He was the 24th Tirthankara and the first active propagator

—Swami Shivananda

5 In short, believers in the creation theory make God a man, bring him down to the level of need and imperfection, whereas Jainism raises man to God-hood and inspires him to raise himself as near to

Godhood as possible by steady faith, right perception, perfect knowledge and, above all, a spotless life.

—Dr. Mohammad Hafiz, Ph D , D Lit

6 The Gospel of Ahimsa was first deeply and systematically expounded and properly and specially preached by the Jaina Tirthankaras, most prominently by the 24th Tirthankara, the last one, Mahavira Vardhamana. Then again by Lord Budha. And at last it was embodied in the thoughts words, deeds and symbolized by the very life of Mahatma Gandhi

—Prof Tan Yun-shan [China]

7 Thus Mahavira appears in the tradition of his own sect as one, who from the beginning, had followed a religion established long ago, had he been the founder of Jainism, tradition ever eager to extol a prophet, would have totally expressed his claims to reverance, as such Nor do Buddhist traditions indicate that the Nirgranthas owed their origin to Nathaputta, they simply speak of them as of a sect existing at the time of Buddha We cannot, therefore, without doing violation to tradition, declare Mahavira to have been the founder of Jainism

—Dr Hermann Jacobi [Germany]

8 Whoever in life has attained the proper intuitive knowledge sins no more. He sees, like Mahavira, all deities at his feet, and is all-knowing Mahavira's is the (earthly) final stage which the perfect ascetic enters and is also called *nirvana* [*jivan-mukti*]

—Max Weber

9 The Jainas themselves, however, regard Mahavira not as the first but as the last of their long series of Tirthankaras The traditional number is 24. ..Such an ascetic is termed a 'hero' [Vira], that is the sense of the title Mahavira, the great [*mahat*] hero [vira] which has been bestowed on the Buddha's contemporary, Vardhamana, the 24th Tirthankara The saint is also termed Jina the 'Victor' and his disciples, therefore, Jainas, the followers of the Victor

—Dr Heinrich Zimmer

10 Well, then, what the Light left in our custody by Lord Mahavira ? Briefly characterised the Light teaches us, [1] Spiritual independence which connotes individual freedom and unlimited responsibility The soul depends upon none else for its progress, and none else is responsible for the degradetion and distress which the soul may be affected with .[2] It teaches us the essential universality of the Brotherhood of not only of all men but of all that lives. The current of life in the lowest living organism is as sacred, subtle, sensitive, mighty and eternal as in Juliet, Cleopatra, Caesar, Alexander, Christ, Mahomet, and Lord Mahavira himself This is the undying basis of our fraternity for all

—Prof J N Farquhar

11. No scholar, I think, will deny that Jainism is one of the greatest and most important creations of Indian mind, still surviving after centuries of glorious life. There is no branch of Indian civilization or litera-

ture or philosophy on which the deeper study of Jainism will not throw light It is impossible for any sound scholar interested in the history of Indian logic to ignore Jain logic, which deserves the largest attention and most diligent researches ....The literature of every belief can be discussed and scrutinized by scholars, but the living essence of Mahavira's doctorine shall remain untouched by any criticism.

—Dr G. Tucci [Italy]

12 The name of Mahavira and Ahimsa culture, is replete with peace unutterable, the Bliss embodied in such seed-name vibrations Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou Mahavira and They Coconquests The example of Thy Victory is the measure for which mankind, and indeed all life imprisoned in matter, can aspire

—Dr William Henry Talbot [England]

13 Through His Jnana and the creed of Ahimsa, Mahavira destroyed the world of the materialistic creed and ethics in a way that we may call Him a Superman of the first kind : We claim for Him the verses of the German Thinker, Herder—

He's hero, the conqueror of battlefields,
He's hero, the conqueror in lion hunting,
But He's Hero of Heroes', the conqueror of Himself !

—Joseph Marie [Bonn, Germany]

14. The teachings of Mahavira sound like the triumphal song of a victorious soul that has at last found in this very world its own deliverance and freedom—. The Religion by Him so modified became the religion of absolute coherence, the most precise, straight, perfect doctrine

—Dr. Alberto Poggi (Italy)

15 The most striking feature in the genius of Mahavira from the psychological point of view is the tremendous will power which characterizes every act of his career during the most significant century in the history of human thought Deliberately, without a single moment of hesitation or doubt, Mahavira proceeds to demonstrate in his own example how the human mind can be disciplined and controlled in such a way that the highest intellectual and spiritual level can be attained in a single life-time

—Dr Felix Valyi

16. Whatever name we give to our creed, whether we believe in souls of animals or not, the noble words of Mahavira are the highest expression of human ethics The great Law of Ahimsa, the Law of Non-violence, as it is called in the western world, is the strongest fundamental principle on which a moral world order can be built for the blessing of all mankind.

—Dr. Alfred W. Parker

17 One of the most prominent features of Lord Mahavira's personality, seems to me to have been an endless energy (Ananta Virya), by means of which the famous Tirthankara, as it were, forced his way through His contemporaries Before his advent, people and even ascetic orders, as is stated in Buddhist sources, were 'living in incontinency (*abrahmacaryavāsa*)'. As for the Vedic Brahmans, they were not so strict in matter of sexual pleasures ....The great strength of the Great Hero Vardhamana manifests itself also in the most rigorous penances He practised with a resolute heart, as when He stripped himself of every sort of cloth and adopted the observance of absolute nakedness Holy life, not only holy words, was His constant rule

—Dr. Ferdinando Belleni-Fillippi

18 All the rules of conduct (laid down by Lord Mahavira) are based on love (*dayā*) Love consists in doing a kindness without any expectation of return, rejoicing at the prosperity of another person, and not being envious, sympathizing with those in distress and where possible helping to relieve it... These rules are not commands The Jain deity issues no commands These rules are an aspect—the mode of behaviour of the man who practises them. .In my opinion Jain doctrines about life and the universe are the plain truth which, as far as I know, is nowhere else to be found I consider them to be of inestimable value, without them I should not know what to believe

—Herbert Warren (England]

19. Pleasures of the world had no attraction for Mahavira's noble soul He who could have lived in luxury, chose the hard life of a Jaina monk, and dwelt apart from the world He dwelt at times in countries inhabited by the most savage tribes. At the hands of these He suffered much in the way of hardships, but in no case did He harbour any feeling of hatred or animosity against those who thus tormented Him

—Mathew Mckay [England]

20 Remember the teaching of Mahavira, the great apostle of Ahimsa and let the non-violence prevail —

> "Towards your fellow-creatures be not hostile. All beings hate pains, therefore one should not kill them "

—Mrs Evelyn S Kleinschmidt [U S A]

21 It is imperative that the creed of universal love and practice of non-violence be accepted by the nations of the world before we stupidly hurtle into the atomic war of self-destruction [Let's hope] Mahavira's teaching of universal love will shine and reign, which emphatically proclaims—

> 'Fight with yourself, why fight with external foes ? He who conquers himself, will obtain happiness!'

—Thomas H Lawerence [Liverpool]

22 If we, men of western origin, do not find this way [to salvation—the solution to the problem of the mechanised occidental world] themselves, we should open our hearts to the messages of the East, where India has grown fit to become the home of a spiritual humanism, where Tirthankara Mahavira proclaimed, "Towards your fellow creatures be not hostile. All beings hate pains therefore do not kill them."

—Walter Leifer [Germany]

23 Liberation of soul from the shackles of the body was accomplished by the supreme Lord Mahavira, the last of the twenty-four world teachers of Jainism. .He, by his great power and soul-force, inspired the souls of entire provinces to heights of pure love, peace, understanding and joy, unknown in this world since the days of the preceding Tirthankara, Lord Parshvanatha Poverty, fear, misunderstandings, envy, lust, were all swept away by the awesome vibrations of his magnetic soul The sight of the Tirthankara is a sufficient answer to the question—'Where is happiness ?' His teachings constitute the way of liberation, and are the greatest of all contributions to human welfare His footprints, for all to follow, lead to Nirvana, where the soul lives eternally in perfection of joy, perception, knowledge and power. During the thirty years, when Mahavira was a world teacher, he proclaimed the truth that man is the master of his own destiny—the Jina or conqueror To refrain

from killing and injuring is the only true religion. The greatest gift that man can make to his fellow-men and the lower creatures is the gift of protection and safety, that they shall come and go without harm or interference

—W George Trott [England]

24. Mahavira was called Nigrantha because he was outwardly unclothed and inwardly free from all worldly bonds and ties And it is not surprising at all that he should be described in Buddhist literature as 'the head of an Order, of a following the teacher of a school, well-known and of repute as a sophist, revered by the people, a man of experience who has long been a recluse'

Those who came under the influence of Mahavira's personality and teachings gave up the eating of meat and fishes for good, and adhered to vegetarian diet

Salvation was preached (by Him) as the birthright of men, and it was assured to all without distinction of caste or creed or sex

—Dr B C Law

25 Man's progress has always been due to the efforts of some highly spiritual personalities who have graced the earth with their presence now and then Such outstanding personalities are not necessarily born in one country or at one time Yet the work of them all is ultimately to make the world happier by making man conscious of his duties towards

those among whom he lives. Mahavira was one of such great teachers of humanity. The doctrine of non-violence, mercy and forbearance reached in Mahavira's teachings its highest expression.

—M. S Aney

26 I think that the Ahimsa as preached by Lard Mahavira avoids both the extremes—absolute, which is impracticable for the laity, and the wanton rule of might, which is thoroughly immoral, and strikes the golden mean which is a path of progress of the soul to its final liberation

—A B Lathe

27 I think it was the tremendous force let loose by Lord Mahavira that really created Lord Buddha I personally believe that if Jainism had kept its hold firmly in India, we would have had a more united India and certainly a greater India than today

—Sir Sanmukbam Chetty

28 If we really wish to understand the full significance of the doctrine—the lesson of Ahimsa that Mahavira taught with such remarkable success—we have to link up its history right from Mahavira and his predecessor Tirthankars to Gandhiji and his writings and actions It is only then that a full history can be written of this teaching which seems today the only solution for the present states of affairs in the world. Then only shall we realise what great seed was sown by Mahavira

—Hon'ble R R. Diwakar

29 It is my belief that Mahavira, like all great teachers, has a message not for any particular sect but for all humanity.... He was the greatest prince of suffering and sacrifice

—Saraswati Raghvachari

30 The Indian doctrine of *Ahimsa* as initiated by our sages [like Mahavira] more than 2000 years ago was mainly subjective and they tried to enforce it by an inward reform of the individual and not by mere votes of a majority, each member of which has at heart his own good or that of his individual nation.

—Dr P K Gode

31 Lord Mahavira had wiped out one and all the passions for ever and could therefore preceive and practise truth—whole truth, though multifarious, and of which an ordinary man can hardly see even one face or aspect This truth is reflected in toto. in his general sermons which have for their adamantine basis the two eternal principles of *anekantvada* and *ahimsa*.

—Prof Hiralal R. Kapadia

32 Sri Vira [Mahavira] from his very childhood was of an extremely unaggressive and non-acquiring disposition The spirit of renunciation was a marked trait in his character and made it possible for him not only not to hanker after worldly possessions but to give away even what he had. His life shows the fundamental principle upon which socialism is to be founded and the way in which its aim and ideal

can be progressively worked out unquestionably. He is the transcendant ideal, to be followed as much faithfully and as much closely as possible

—Dr. Harisatya Bhattacharya

33 Lord Mahavira, who was the last in a long series of Jain Savants believed to go back to the dawn of civilization, was a personality of great power and radiance His impact is by no means confined either to those who specifically call themselves Jains or to the boundaries of India. Through the ages eminent thinkers from various parts of the world have studied Lord Mahavira and his teachings and have commented upon them from their own special view points

—Dr Karan Singh

34 The history of Vardhamana Mahavira is a legend of eternity and the emancipation of soul on the way of Time Through centuries of yore the saga has conveyed truths in respect of immortality beyond space and the elements reflecting as it were the glory of Jina embodying the final serenity transcendental and beyond the bondage of illusion Thus the life of the Nirgrantha is not only an inspiration for renunciation to establish a concord with the ideals of Nirvana but also a tale of highest bliss which has evoked alike a calm grandeur in art from early times

—Prof P C Dasgupta

35. In socialism all are given opportunities and any person can aspire to be a great person by his efforts Mahavira's life is a true testimony to this principle enunciated today. .Mahavira belonged to the class of sages and saints who did sympathise with the sufferings of the poor and down-trodden and did serve humanity by their sincere and pious deeds. He preached such philosophy by which some social order be established on the firm foundations of universal love and universal brotherhood, and spirit of altruism which are the basic principles of socialistic discipline of any age and of any country

—Dr P M Upadhye

36 Bhagawan Mahavira has given to the humanity an invaluable message so that all can live and yet save their souls. Let us follow the practical path shown to us by Bhagawan Mahavira and make ourselves worthy of his inheritance

—Justice T K Tukol

37 Mahavira set an unusually high saandard of ascetic morality which has led many an earlier student of Indian philosohy and religion to regard him as an originator of a new system.

—Prof J P Sharma

38 At such a time (as the present), it seems to me that Mahavira's message of Ahimsa, Anekant and Aparigraha is the only guiding light-house which can save the nation and humanity as a whole from the ship-wreck in the turbulent ocean of life . ..... Mahavira's contribution to the national and emotional integration of our country can be seen in many ways

—Dr V R Nagar

39 Today few things are more relevant and crucial to human progress than the Path of Ahimsa illumined, practised and taught by Lord Mahavira Ahimsa is a dynamic concept New aspects and new applications are continually unfolding with man's earnest ceaseless quest The imcomparable example of Mahatma Gandhi had added a new dimension. His life was synonimous with pursuit of and experiments in non-violence and truth It has reinforced to a degree unimaginable today mankind's strength and faith to follow the path of Amimsa as a way of life

—Dr D S Kothari

40 Lord Mahavira attained liberation two thousand and five hundred years ago, but still the wisdom he bequeathed to humanity is profound and great Masses view him as the great cherisher of moral pursuit and little is known to the people about the scientific spirit embodied in the sayings of the great ascetic

—Dr M S Murdia

41. Lord Mahavira adopted a simple, logical, convincing, realistic and also scientific method of explaining the basic but universal principles of his teaching He did not want to stuff the heads of the ignorant masses with mere symbols, rituals and images in the name of religious truth, because his primary concern was not to present unwanted sophisticated mass of information to his hearers but transformation, a rationalistic change of man's defiled way of life

—D. S Parmraj

42 The highest value which Bhagawan Mahavira, one of the greatest humanists the civilized world has ever produced, set for judging human behaviour is man's reverence for life in all its forms, no violence is to be intended, expressed or inflicted through thought, word or act on any living being. This is known as Ahimsa Similarly, though a prince by birth, Mahavira adopted a mode of living with minimum attachment for the world and its ties He controlled his desires and put limits to his needs, thus he found solutions to various problems of life and death Not only he preached non-attachment but he lived a life which fully illustrated what it means His preachings are meant for one and all who seek guidance from him Intellectual tolerance, i. e, appreciation of the point of view of others, is the halmark of his philosophy

—Dr. A N Upadhye

43 Mahavira is one of those few towering personalities who fought for individual liberty in the context of social life—in his philosophy of life, if individual liberty is to be sought, social responsibilities cannot be dispensed with.

—Dr K C Sogani

44 Mahavira was neither a 'delicate mystic' nor an 'energetic prophet' He was a thorough-going rationalist who would base his action on his conviction, unmindful of the context of established custom or innherited tradition. This is the keynote of the personality ef Lord Mahavira

—Dr Bool Chand

45 Full and complete knowledge based on right faith and translated into right conduct coupled, at the same time, with complete non-attachment to non-soul matters was considered by Lord Mahavira as a condition precedent for the final release of the soul from the bondage of world life

—L A Phaltane

46 Mahavira, like the Buddha and the Upanishadic seers, had been a unifying force The Indian historical sense differs from that of the west To Indians the self-transformation achieved by Mahavir and Buddha is more important than are dates The tenets of Jainism are of value in every day life; and the doctrines of Non-violence and Tolerance are applicable in international politics and are of importance for peaceful coexistence

—Prof. N A Nikam

47 Mahavira was deeply influenced by the democratic ethos of the society in which he was brought up. He was also impressed by the inadequate applicat-ion of this ethos in the political, economic and social life of the community without its being based upon a really democratic religious system, so that he took it upon himself to work out and propagate a system of complete spritual democracy

—Dr. Amar Chand

48 The Significance of Tirthankara Mahavira lies in successfully effecting a social change and in making institutional and other arragements for the perpetu-ation of his new social order.

—Dr V A Sangave

49 It is due to his rare qualities of an ideal reformer, an able organiser, a patronising guru, a convincing debator, a zealous missionary and an upholder of the equalty of all human beings, that the name of Lord Mahavira still remains and shall ever remain a cherished inspiration to humanity at large It is well over two and a half thousand years that the personality of Lord Mahavira illumined the reli-gious horizon of India And yet with the passage of several centuries, the influene of his teachings, instead of waning, as happend in the case of several others, is on the increase

—Dr S. B. Deo

50. Mahavira Vardhamana gave freedom of thought, speech and work to all, in a period when it was deemed impossible to even raise one's voice against the existing religious dogmas and rituals, howsoever absurd and intolerable were they. He set an example of the highest and noblest type of heroism, and so people remembered him by the name Mahavira.

—Kamta Prasad Jain

51 Let us remember Mahavira and try to learn from him and gather the ray in our own small gardens of hearts, in the hope that some seeds would sprout; some buds would blossom. Great men elevate, their memory ennobles.

—Dr Prabhakar Machve

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Besides the books mentioned above, quite a number of articles by Indian and foreign writers have been published, those by the present author (Dr. J. P Jain) include the topics —

Mahavira the Great Apostle of Ahimsa, Mahavira the great Benefactor of Mankind, Message of Mahavira the last Tirthamkara, Lord Mahavira in Early Buddhist Literature, Renunciation the keynote of Lord Mahavira's Life and Teachings, Social and Religious conditions in Bhagwan Mahavira's Times, The Age of Mahavira, Deepavali, Lord Mahavira's Life and Teachings, Mahavira's Compassion for animals, Revival of Shramana Dharma in Later Vedic Age, Eminent Jains of Mahavira's Times, Nectar of Lord Mahavira saying, Relevance of Mahavira's Message in the World of Today

For a better understanding of Bhagwan Mahavira's heritage, the reader is referred to *Religion and Culture of the Jains*, by Dr Jyoti Prasad Jain, published by Bharatiya Jnanpith, New Delhi, 1975, (third ed 1982), and such other books on the subject